

THE PURITAN MOVEMENT

for three centuries. In England the effect was that at once of an irritant and of a tonic. Puritanism had its own standards of social conduct, derived partly from the obvious interests of the commercial classes, partly from its conception of the nature of God and the destiny of man. These standards were in sharp antithesis, both to the considerable surviving elements of feudalism in English society, and to the policy of the authoritarian State, with its ideal of an ordered and graded society, whose different members were to be maintained in their traditional status by the pressure and protection of a paternal monarchy. Sapping the former by its influence, and overthrowing the latter by direct attack, Puritanism became a potent force in preparing the way for the commercial civilization which finally triumphed at the Revolution.

The complaint that religious radicalism, which aimed at upsetting the government of the Church, went hand in hand with an economic radicalism, which resented the restraints on individual self-interest imposed in the name of religion or of social policy, was being made by the stricter school of religious opinion quite early in the reign of Elizabeth.⁵⁷ Seventeenth-century writers repeated the charge that the Puritan conscience lost its delicacy where matters of business were con-

cerned, and some of them were sufficiently
struck by
the phenomenon to attempt an historical
explanation
of it. The example on which they usually
seized—the
symbol of a supposed general disposition to
laxity—
was the indulgence shown by Puritan
divines in the
particular matter of moderate interest.
It was the
effect, so the picturesque story ran,⁸⁸ of
the Marian
persecution. The refugees who fled to the
Continent
could not start business in a foreign
country. If,
driven by necessity, they invested their
capital and
lived on the proceeds, who could quarrel
with so venial
a lapse in so good a cause?
Subsequent writers